

Scottish Child Payment awards in Scottish Borders to 31st March 2021

A Scottish Borders insight produced by the Corporate Performance and Information R&I team

Introduction

Scottish Child Payment is a new benefit introduced by Social Security Scotland for low-income families with children aged under 6.

It is intended to provide regular, additional financial support for families already in receipt of qualifying benefits to assist with the costs of caring for a child. The value of the payment is an extra £10 per qualifying child per week.

There will be further rollouts of the benefit to eventually include families with children under 16 by the end of 2022, in line with the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling child poverty.

Applications for Scottish Child Payment opened on 9 November 2020 and the first payments were made in February 2021.

The statistics on applications, decisions and payments are kept and published by Scotland's Chief Statistician. The full publication can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-child-payment-high-level-statistics-on-applications-to-31-march-2021/>

Key findings for Scottish Borders

Over 104,000 applications have been received for Scottish Child Payment in Scotland so far. 1,816 of these were from Scottish Borders, representing 2% of all applications received.

Glasgow City has by far the highest number and percentage of applications (over 17,000 applications/ 17%), followed by North Lanarkshire, Fife and City of Edinburgh. This is illustrated in the first graph below.

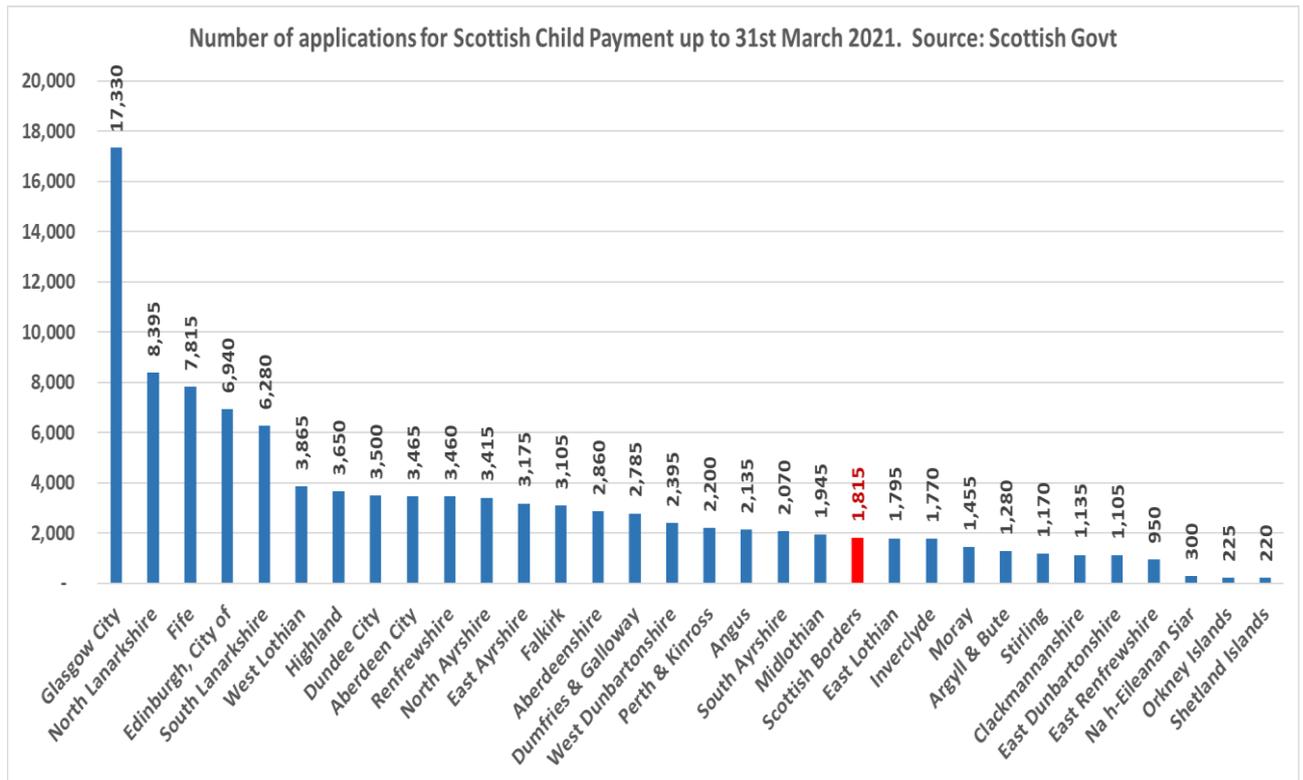
The number of applications by Local Authority area can help to form a picture of the distribution of child poverty in Scotland. The picture suggests that the scale of child poverty is huge in Scotland's two biggest cities, and the regions around them. This is to be expected as they have much bigger populations and wider and deeper pockets of Multiple Deprivation, which is already known about from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Scottish Borders is one of a number of less-deprived and more rural Local Authority areas such as the Lothians, Angus and Perth & Kinross which each submitted around 2% of the Scottish Child Payment applications. It suggests, reasonably, that child poverty in these areas is on a much smaller scale than in the main cities.

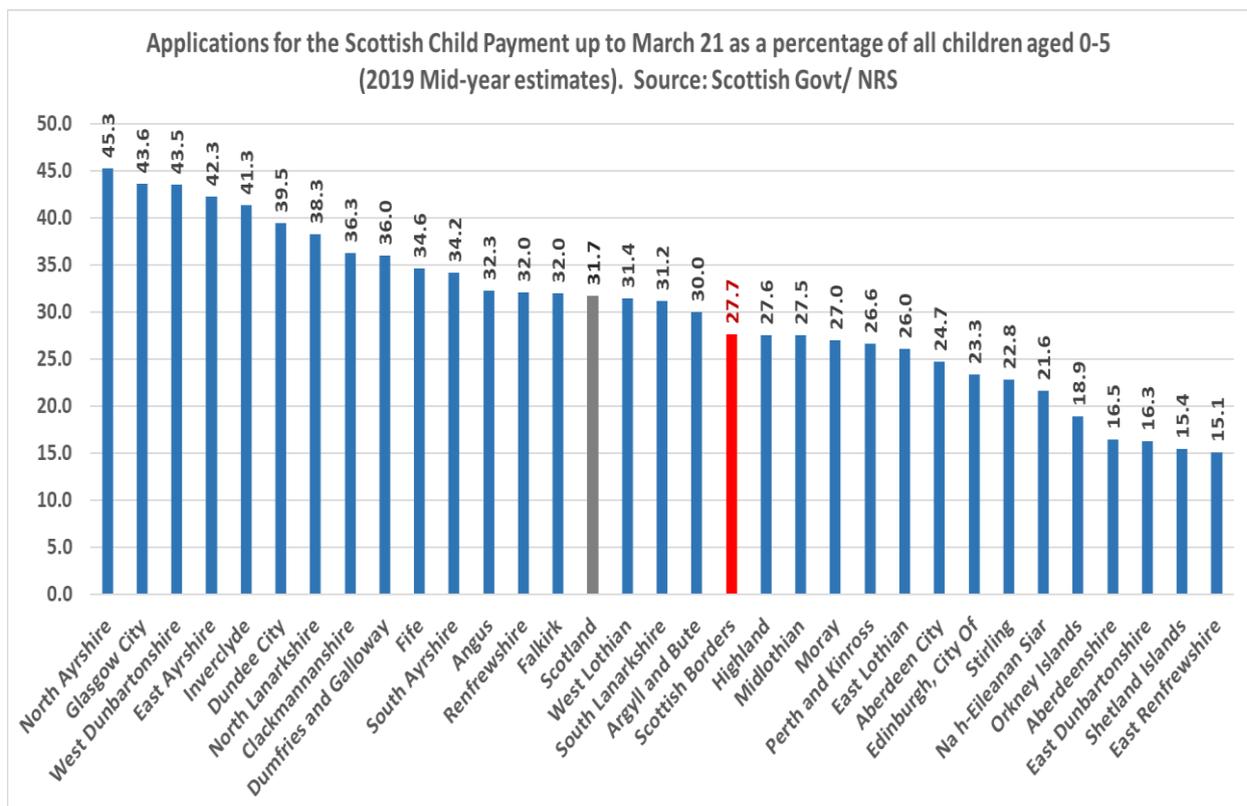
However, this does not mean there is less child poverty, in proportion with the eligible population. When the number of applications are calculated as a percentage of under 6s, it emerges that applications in Scottish Borders are proportionally higher than in Edinburgh, as illustrated in the second graph below.

The statistics found that around 92% of the applications were successful and this varies little between Local Authority areas. The main reasons for the application not being successful were usually because the applicant did not provide sufficient supporting evidence that they were eligible. An average of 6% were denied and a further 2% withdrew their application; again, this varies little between Local Authority areas

The number of applications received up until 31st March 2021 by Local Authority area is shown in the graph below. This reflects the scale of the challenge faced by Scottish Government in the more populated parts of Scotland and appears to show that the need in terms of child poverty is much higher in Scotland’s main cities. In terms of sheer numbers, this is indeed the case.



However, when viewed at a percentage of all children aged 5 and under, the picture looks quite different. Proportionally, the need for child poverty relief in Scottish Borders is somewhat higher than the crude number of applications suggest. On average, over a quarter of children aged under 5 in Scottish Borders have been the subject of an application for the Scottish Child Payment, which is higher than several of Scottish Borders' comparator Local Authorities and higher than in Edinburgh. The proportions in Glasgow and the west of Scotland are still outstandingly higher than the Scottish average. Proportionally, child poverty in Edinburgh is considerably lower, and below Scottish average.



Conclusion

The statistics that are beginning to emerge from application and award levels of the Scottish Child Payment are a welcome addition to the tools that Local Authorities can use to measure child poverty. This dataset provides a snapshot of the number and proportion of Scottish Child Payment applicants in Scottish Borders, in proportion with other parts of Scotland. Further datasets will provide further snapshots, until a pattern or a trend begins to emerge. Local Authorities will need to wait until several years' worth of continuous and comparable data are available before any meaningful trends begin to emerge from the data.

Tackling Child Poverty is a major commitment by Scottish Government which is cascaded down to the statutory duties of Local Authorities, in the form of an obligation to maintain an up-to-date Child Poverty Action Plan for their region. However, there is a relative scarcity of rigorous statistics on child poverty that are specific to Scotland's needs. Most of the evidence used to inform regional Child Poverty Action plans come from survey data, which are sampled and sometimes do not even measure child poverty at regional level.

However, statistics that are based on welfare benefits should also be used with caution. Firstly, this benefit is a top-up to existing welfare benefits, and serves merely to confirm what existing welfare benefit statistics already tell us about child poverty. Secondly, not all households living with child poverty are able to meet the criteria for claiming the qualifying benefits, including the 8% whose application to the Scottish Child Payment was unsuccessful for the same reasons. This is particularly true of rural areas, where there is less worklessness and more dependency on informal family networks for child support rather than on the welfare benefits system.

Nevertheless, Scottish Child Payment Statistics are a potentially useful addition to the evidence base available to Local Authority areas for measuring child poverty.